



Senator Sheila Kuehl

23rd District Newsletter • April 2006

The Defeat of Legislation to Clean Up the Rocketdyne Test Site

The Second of Four Articles
by Laura Plotkin

The first article set out the history of the meltdown and contamination of the Rocketdyne test site. This article chronicles attempts to require cleanup at the site.

Very quickly after the George W. Bush Administration took office, longstanding commitments made by the federal government to thoroughly clean up the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL) were summarily reversed. The site had become extensively contaminated with radio-

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active materials and toxic chemicals during decades of work undertaken for various federal agencies such as the Atomic Energy Commission, and repeated promises had been made to the local community and elected officials that the site would be thoroughly remediated up to

United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards. Additionally, EPA had repeatedly assured us that they would conduct a thorough radiation survey of the site to pinpoint the exact locations of contamination that needed to be cleaned up.

Suddenly, all those commitments were reversed. The Department of Energy (DOE) announced they would leave in place 98% of the radioactively contaminated soil and, despite this, that they would release the site for unrestricted residential use. We were appalled at the possible results: children could end up living on top of strontium-90 and cesium-137 that everyone knew was there from the meltdown. The DOE also announced that EPA would not be conducting a radiation survey. EPA, helpless to intervene since authority over the site had been given to the Federal Department of Energy, was left only to criticize the decisions,

saying that, under those circumstances, the site would be completely unsafe for housing and barely safe for day hikes.

Senator Kuehl tried repeatedly to find a state law resolution to these problems. In 2001 she introduced SB 243, which would have required all former reactor sites in the state to be cleaned up to the most protective EPA standards and all radioactive waste to be disposed of in licensed radioactive waste disposal facilities. This latter provision was in response to revelations that Rocketdyne had been dumping radioactive debris from decommissioning old reactor buildings at SSFL in local municipal landfills, such as Bradley landfill in the North San Fernando Valley. They had also sold radioactive scrap from the reactors to a metal recycler in San Pedro, and there was a great danger that the radioactive metals would end up in the consumer metal supply. There was heavy and sustained lobbying against the bill by the Boeing Company as well as labor unions trying to curry favor with Boeing. The bill failed.

The next year, she introduced SB 2444, which narrowed the previous year's efforts in order to focus simply on cleanup standards and monitoring. During the course of the legislative ses-

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Whatever Happened to the Infrastructure Bond?

By Senator Sheila Kuehl

Beginning in January, discussions regarding a number of competing infrastructure bond proposals completely dominated the 2006 legislative session. Last year, Senator Don Perata, the Senate President Pro Tem, kick-started the discussion with a proposal that included transportation and levees. This year, we had a number of proposals from the governor and other legislators that included flood control, education, transportation, housing, parks and water. As everyone now knows, attempts all the way up to the March 15th deadline to get any bond proposal on the June ballot failed.

Here's what happened: The Governor proposed a massive \$221 billion set of projects, sketched throughout what amounted to a proposal for \$68 billion in a near-term package to go before the voters. The bonds were sent, under our rules, to each major policy committee in each house devoted to the subject matter of the bond. I am Chair of the Natural Resources and Water Committee, which held five hearings on the flood, levee, parks, and other resources attributes of the proposal. Our Committee, and especially our wonderful staff, worked doggedly to shape our part of the bond regarding flood control, shoring up levees, local water projects, statewide water projects and resources. The majority on our committee were insistent that resources be seen as an important aspect of infrastructure, just as important to our lives as roads, levees, or schools. I'm very pleased that, until a last-minute breakdown, described below, the Democrats in both houses agreed with the entire approach recommended in our committee report, and I'm also very pleased that the Republican members supported our committee report except for the inclusion of the parks and resources components. Members of the Legislature from both parties complimented the Committee's integrity and openness.

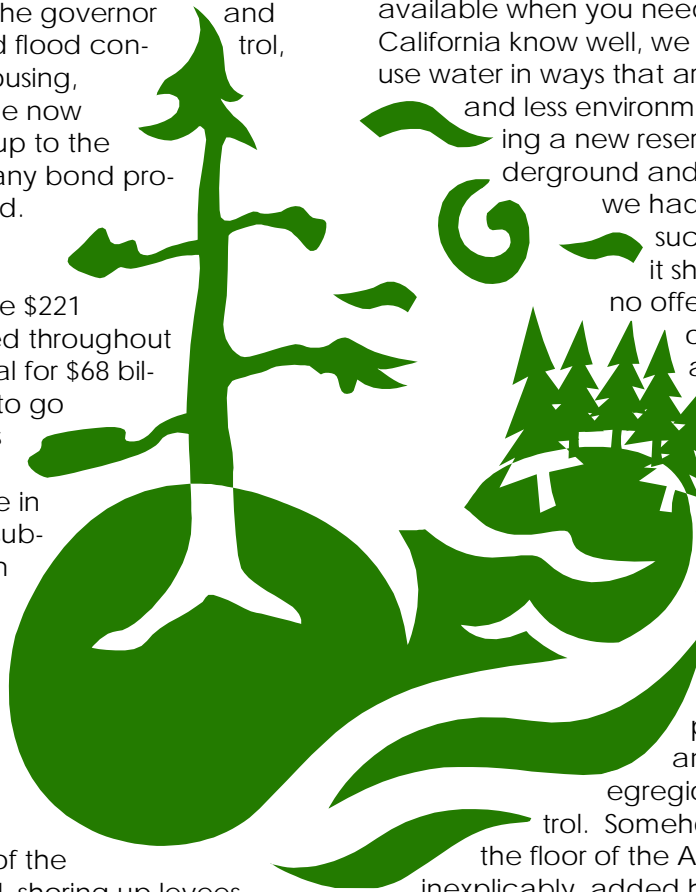
Unfortunately, the bipartisanship evaporated on the night of Friday, March 10th, after coming to the Floor in the evening to adopt a package we believed had achieved agreement. The almost \$50 billion dollar proposal included transportation, transit, associated

air quality issues, flood control, water projects, school construction and resources, including a good deal of money for urban parks. The major sticking point, amazingly, seemed to boil down only to whether the bond should write a blank check for a new dam. Never mind that the Governor's own water report had shown that spending billions to build a new dam was the least efficient way to make water more available when you need it. As those of us in Southern California know well, we can conserve water and re-use water in ways that are much more cost-effective and less environmentally damaging than building a new reservoir. We can store water underground and save billions. In Sacramento, we had no offers to help pay for such a dam, no plans on where it should be built, and, incredibly, no offers to buy the water once any of the dams were built. Even against that reality, we had legislators who insisted that a dam be built. I called it the "new dam religion."

After the breakdown of the vote, the Governor, anxious to have anything at all on the June ballot, agreed with the Speaker of the Assembly and Senator Perata simply to put a levee fix on the ballot and take care of the most egregious needs for flood control. Somehow, when this proposal got to the floor of the Assembly, the Speaker had, inexplicably, added his Education Bond onto the proposal. Since transportation and resources were both important to the Senate, we opted, instead, simply to authorize the Governor to spend up to one billion dollars on levee repair immediately and continue to talk about what bond package could go on the November ballot.

I hope there will be a bond on the November ballot. There is a great need and, with any leadership at all from the Governor's office, I know legislators will support. Only time will tell, however, if the Governor is able to generate sufficient Republican votes for what I think is the most worthy proposal offered by the Senate—a bond to truly repair the crumbling infrastructure of our great state.

State Sen. Sheila Kuehl, D-Santa Monica, represents the 23rd Senate District. She is the chairwoman of the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee, and heads the budget subcommittee with jurisdiction over resources, water, energy and utilities.



Third Community Meeting on Gang Violence Presents Updates by Action Partners, Community Testimony

by Hilda Garcia

On Saturday, March 18, our office, along with our co-sponsors the City of Santa Monica and the Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District held the third community townhall devoted to gang violence in the City of Santa Monica. In February of last year, hundreds of people from the community gathered at John Adams Middle School for our first meeting on gang violence.

At that meeting, we divided into groups to identify



achievable youth-centered strategies for decreasing gang violence in Santa Monica. The plan included strategies to promote a sense of belonging, respect and identity, to reflect cultural/ethnic sensitivity and competence and to involve individuals and institutions community-wide.

In April of last year, at the second community gathering, an Action Plan was developed by the participants under which a number of community action partners took on individual responsibilities designed to work toward all the identified goals and to reduce gang violence in the City of Santa Monica. In between the two meetings the city took all of the ideas and commitments and organized them into three areas: *Bring It Home*; *Make It Work*; and *Keep It Safe*. The city also met with community leaders to get additional commitments, more action partners and additional ideas for stemming gang violence.

At the third meeting, last month, over 200 community members came together at John Adams Middle School to hear updates and progress reports on efforts made to date by all the action partners. The Community Action Partners reported on ways they were dedi-

cating resources such as training, jobs, education, and programs targeting at-risk youth. Members of the community also expressed frustration and hope about additional ways that institutional actors and community organizations and individuals could continue to communicate and work together to improve the safety, lives and futures of young people in Santa Monica. The work will continue.

To review the progress reports, please contact Hilda Garcia in the district office at 310-441-9084.

Hilda Garcia is a Field Representative in Senator Kuehl's District Office.

Oxnard Employment Training Panel Workshop

by Hilda Garcia

On March 11, our office organized an Employment Training Panel Workshop (ETP) to educate businesses in the Oxnard area about possible state resources that could help their businesses. The State Department of Employment Training Panel came to Oxnard to present a program about ETP programs and how they can be utilized to help both small and large businesses.

Since 1983, ETP, a California State agency, has been providing training to meet the needs of employers for skilled workers and the need of workers for good, long-term jobs. ETP's programs support the California economy, primarily by funding the retraining of incumbent, frontline workers in companies challenged by out-of-state competition. ETP also funds training for unemployed workers, and prioritizes small businesses, and employers and workers in high unemployment areas of the State.

Independent research has documented the value of ETP-funded training for businesses and workers, alike. Overall, there has been a return on investment of over \$5 for every \$1 in ETP funds spent on training, as measured in benefits to companies, workers, and California's economy. If you would like more information please contact Hilda Garcia in the district office 310-441-9084.

Hilda Garcia is a Field Representative in Senator Kuehl's District Office.

Transportation Bills a Priority for the 23rd Senate District

SB 1026: 405 Diamond Lane

SB 1026 (Kuehl), signed into law last January 13, authorizes the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority, in consultation with Caltrans, to construct the northbound high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane on the 405 freeway between Highway 10 and the 101. Senate Bill 1026 will, hopefully, help relieve some of the congestion on the 405 freeway. The new law allows LA's two transportation agencies to contract for design and construction from the same entity, allowing construction to begin sooner and meeting a deadline to preserve \$130 million in federal funds dedicated to this project.

SB 1026 had widespread support from LA Legislators and transportation folks.

SB 1300: Mobile Photo Radar Speed Enforcement

SB 1300 (Kuehl), sponsored by the City of Beverly Hills, authorizes a pilot project in that city employing a Mobile Photo Radar Speed Enforcement System (MPRSE), in order to reduce speeding on neighborhood streets.

The use of an MPRSE system is an important public safety tool in residential neighborhoods and school zones. The bill allows Beverly Hills to operate a pilot program in which a clearly marked city vehicle, equipped with radar, monitors the speed of drivers and also photographs both the driver and license plate of the vehicle traveling above the speed limit. A citation will then be mailed to the owner of the vehicle. Just as in current law regarding red lights at intersections, the owner of the vehicle and/or the alleged violator is provided with an opportunity for appeal.



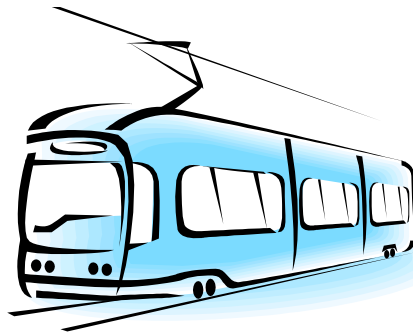
MPRSE systems are currently used in a number of states, including Colorado, Oregon, Utah, and Washington, D.C. A study performed by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety concluded that, within the first six months of photo radar enforcement in the District of Columbia, "the proportion of vehicles exceeding the speed limit by more than 10 mph declined 82 percent."

Senate Bill 1300 will allow California to determine, through a pilot program, whether MPRSE systems ac-

tually improve public safety. The legislation protects a driver's right to due process and ensures the confidentiality of sensitive information. SB 1300 should help make Beverly Hills neighborhoods safer for their residents and their school zones safer for children and adults.

SB 1384: Exposition Light Rail Project

In 2003, SB 504 (Kuehl) created the Expo Construction Authority to facilitate the construction of the Expo Light Rail. Senate Bill 504 was modeled after the Gold Line Construction Authority, which did a great job at constructing the Gold Line. Senator Kuehl introduced SB 1384 this year to make changes in her original SB 504 to ensure that the Expo Construction Authority has the legal right to manage all aspects of building the line from downtown LA to Santa Monica.



This new legislation will allow the Exposition Construction Authority to undertake additional responsibilities such as planning and building phase 2, from Culver City to Santa Monica,

while constructing phase 1 from downtown LA to Culver City. Finally, the bill will allow the Construction Authority to conduct the needed environmental studies as part of planning for phase 2.

Senator Kuehl is firmly committed to getting the Expo Light Rail Line built all the way to Santa Monica and believes that this legislation can expedite the process. The Expo Construction Authority has been meeting since July 2005 and plans to break ground and begin construction sometime this summer.

SB 1583: Marvin Braude Bikeway

SB 1583 (Kuehl) proposes to name the entire beach bicycle path in Los Angeles County, between Pacific Palisades and the City of Torrance, in memory of Marvin Braude. Marvin Braude passed away on December 7, 2005, but the fruits of his labor live on. Anyone who has ever enjoyed a walk in the Santa Monica Mountains or a bike ride along Venice Beach has Marvin Braude to thank. If Senate Bill 1583 becomes law, recognition and visibility will be given to a man who did so much for open space and outdoor recreation.

(TRANSPORTATION continued on page 5)

sion, the bill was narrowed further, to focus just on cleaning up and monitoring only of the Rocketdyne site. The bill would have required cleanup of SSFL to the California Department of Health Services' own standard for cleaning up military bases. Again, after heavy lobbying

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against, this bill failed in the Assembly, garnering 31 aye votes and 32 noes, with the rest of the Assembly not voting (41 votes are needed to pass bills in the Assembly).

In 2003, Senator Kuehl moved SB 208, which would require SSFL to be cleaned up to EPA's Superfund standards and monitored pursuant to EPA's proposed survey, as previously promised. The bill was put "on suspense"

in the Appropriations Committee, meaning it couldn't move forward that year.

In 2004, the effort continued with SB 1456, which would simply have required SSFL to be cleaned up to EPA's Superfund standards, as had long been promised. Again, having passed the Senate, as did the previous bills, the bill died in the Assembly with 30 aye votes and 39 noes, with 11 abstentions.

Why should such a "no brainer" of a concept – that you don't let children live or play on a nuclear meltdown site until it has been cleaned up

to standards EPA says are safe – have had such a tough time getting through the Assembly? Boeing.

Emily Churg, then an undergraduate at UC Santa Cruz and now a law student at UC Davis, decided to test an hypothesis that campaign contributions by Boeing may have played a role. She tracked the average donation by Boeing to the members of the Assembly who had voted for SB 1456 against those who had voted against it and those who had abstained. (Remember that an abstention has the same effect as a "no" vote, as a majority of the total membership, not simply the number of those voting, is required for a bill to pass).

Churg found that Boeing had given an average of \$1636 to each Assemblymember who abstained on SB 1456 and \$1354 to each who had voted against it. By contrast, those who voted for SB 1456 received an average of \$425. In other words, Boeing had given 3-4 times as much money to those who had acted to kill the bill than those who supported it.

Naturally, no Assemblymember makes a decision purely based on contributions, but, where there is no deeper principle, and a lack of experience due to term limits, the arguments of those who seem supportive can often prevail. "Scientists" are brought to contradict testimony at hearings. Lobbyists marshal workers who say their jobs are threatened if Boeing is not allowed to sell the site. In installment three, the work continues.

Laura Plotkin is Senator Kuehl's District Director.

Marvin Braude was a visionary and steadfast public servant who represented the Westside on the LA City Council from 1965 to 1997. He was well known for his determined and persistent work as a public servant, perhaps best illustrated by his 20-year battle for smoking in public places. His efforts culminated in 1993 when the LA City Council passed a ban on smoking in the City's 7,000 restaurants, making Los Angeles the largest city in the nation to take such a step.

But Marvin Braude will most fondly be remembered for his dedication to protecting open space and parks. When he was first elected to the LA City Council, the fate of the Santa Monica Mountains was in doubt with much of the land zoned for development. Braude advocated for tighter zoning laws that resulted in a reduction in the size of development; and his advocacy was

crucial to the many acquisitions in the Santa Monica Mountains that today make the area a model for preservation in the middle of a large urban area. Braude's work with former Congressman Anthony Beilenson, and others, culminated in the creation of the Santa Monica National Recreation Area.

Braude was also an avid cyclist, and was frequently seen bicycling to the beach with his wife, Marjorie, from their home in Brentwood. In the early 70s, he spearheaded an effort to build a bike path along a well traveled part of Venice Beach. In 1989, the final 1.2 mile strip in the City of Santa Monica was completed. If Senator Kuehl is successful, in 2007, the very popular 22.3 mile long beach bike path will officially be named and eventually be known as the Marvin Braude Bikeway.

California Health Insurance Reliability Act Update

by Sara Rogers

Rising health care costs have been making news headlines for nearly a decade now, and health care reform is firmly rooted as a staple of dinner table conversation. We hear every year that health insurance premiums are swelling by double digits, and most of us have felt the impact of this on our pocketbook (or perhaps our credit statements). We hear that our hospital services are increasingly strained by rising numbers of uninsured Californians, most of whom are average working families. If General Motors is any indication, we all have good reason to wonder if the health care system is even going to be there when we need it.

The debate around health reform seems to be limited to bickering about who is going to pay for these huge increases in health care costs; should physicians earn less, should hospitals charge less, should employers pay more, should consumers pay more? The more difficult question, one that SB 840 helps to answer, is, "Why are health care costs rising in the first place?"

Senate Bill 840 (Kuehl), the California Health Insurance Reliability Act, is California's plan to establish a system of universal health insurance in California. It provides every California resident with comprehensive health care benefits in a way that is affordable for individuals and businesses, contains the growth in health care spending, and guarantees the right of the patient to choose his or her own physician.

A recent survey published by Small Business California found that 52% of small businesses would support a "single-payer system similar to what Canada has where the government finances health care but keeps the delivery of health care to mostly private sources". Another poll published by the California Public Policy Institute found that 60% of Californians support this kind of model.

These indications point to a growing sense of urgency for change, one that could create a favorable wind for SB 840. The California Nurses Association recently announced that they wanted to become the principal sponsor of SB 840. The nurses decided to make universal healthcare their number one priority after several hundred nurses went to volunteer in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and discovered that a large number of the patients they were helping were receiving medical care for the very first time in their lives.

A growing network of organizations is pushing for this change on a grassroots level throughout the state. Building upon the organizing work of Health Care for All and the California Physicians Alliance

(CaPA), teachers, school employees, health advocates, social workers, medical students, retiree groups, faith-based groups, and others are working to build an effective citizen's movement strong enough to overcome opposition by the insurance industry.

Across the state, this coalition is actively organizing educational forums, letter writing campaigns, speakers' trainings, and more. They are asking City Councils, Boards of Supervisors, School Boards, and even Water Districts to pass resolutions in support of SB 840. They are coordinating with one another, sharing materials and working together on this common goal.

SB 840 is currently in the Assembly, having passed the Senate policy committees, the Senate Floor, and the Assembly Health committee. The next hurdle is the Assembly appropriations committee. The deadline in that committee is August 18th.

In addition, Senator Kuehl has introduced SB 1784 to establish a mechanism to collect premiums and consolidate state and federal money in this system. SB 840 will be funded by consolidating all the public money spent on health care, as well as replacing the private premiums, co-payments and deductibles, now paid by individuals and employers, with premiums paid to the system. The Lewin study, available at www.healthcareforall.org provides a glimpse of the kinds of premiums it might take to fund the system. SB 1784 simply creates the mechanism needed to collect those premiums.

To become involved with this growing movement, please visit www.healthcareforall.org and contact your local chapter President. To add yourself to our email update list, email Senator.Kuehl@sen.ca.gov with "subscribe SB 840" in the subject line.

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The Role of a Chief of Staff

*By Carol Wallisch, Chief of Staff
The First in a Series*

Every month, Senator Kuehl and our newsletter editor, Tam Ma, ask our staff if anyone has a suggestion for a newsletter article. Of course, I ought to know better, but I couldn't help myself--I made a suggestion. I thought that constituents might be interested in what a typical day or week might look like for each of our staff members. Naturally, I was asked to write the first article about what I do in my job as Senator Kuehl's chief of staff.



As chief of staff, I oversee Senator Kuehl's Capitol Office, District Office, Natural Resources and Water Committee, and her subcommittees and select committees. My overarching responsibility involves ensuring that Senator Kuehl has all the information she needs to vote on issues, chair committees, present her bills, speak at

press conferences and other venues, and address issues in her district. Because she sits on more standing committees (that is, committees that hear and vote on bills) than any other Senator and because she is a popular speaker, coordinating information going from our staff to her and back consumes a major part of my work day.

I attempt to be available to Senator Kuehl and each member of the staff as much as possible so that I can help each person strategize about bills or help them find information. My day begins about 8:30 am and continues until about

7:30 pm. Some days are longer and sometimes I work on weekends as well. I bring my lunch and rarely leave my desk except to go to meetings. Since I must keep up with all the issues on which the staff are working, I set priorities or enforce

priorities that the Senator or the Senate has set. Sometimes I feel like the chief nag.

When I'm not nagging, I'm answering questions from the Senator, her staff, other legislative staff, or the public. In fact, I am inter-

rupted constantly from Monday morning until Thursday afternoon when the Legislators leave for their districts. My nervous system has so adjusted to interruptions that I am hardly able to work without them.

I do love my job, well, most of the time. Sometimes I'm overwhelmed with the quantity of information that I must process. I worry that I haven't given Senator Kuehl all the information she needs to make a good decision. I hate the long hours of indecision over the budget or, most recently, the infrastructure bond.

On the other hand, Senator Kuehl and her staff are incredibly bright, knowledgeable, conscientious, and kind. I learn something new every day. I have the opportunity to improve the lives of many people. I have the honor of serving our constituents who truly care about their state and its people.

(Note from Senator Kuehl: Carol Wallisch is known as one of the best and most knowledgeable chiefs of staff in the Building. She is, simply, the best, and we're lucky to have her).

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23rd Senate District. The 23rd Senate District includes the cities of Agoura Hills, Beverly Hills, Calabasas, Hidden Hills, Malibu, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Santa Monica, West Hollywood and Westlake Village and the communities of Bel Air, Brentwood, Canoga Park, Encino, Hollywood, Mt. Olympus, Pacific Palisades, Sherman Oaks, Studio City, Tarzana, Topanga, West Los Angeles, West Hills, Westwood and Woodland Hills.

